Phoenix Historical Society
Organized in 1998; Opened in 1999

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A Rich History--Phoenix Pioneer Cemetery

Photo by Andy Atkinson/Rogue Valley Times
New archway sign over the Phoenix Pioneer Cemetery produced by S&P Fabrication of Grants Pass.

One of the region's oldest cemeteries made its sesquicentennial beneath a towering new iron archway November 16, 2024. Phoenix Pioneer Cemetery coordinators and volunteers observed the anniversary of the old graveyard exactly 150 years after it was first dedicated Nov. 16, 1874.

The 2 acres of land was originally purchased for a mere $49. Established in 1874--just 14 years after the one in Jacksonville that is one of the region's oldest was dedicated--the Phoenix Pioneer Cemetery is the town's second official graveyard.

The city of Phoenix, established in the early 1850s, first utilized a small cemetery on a hillside near present day Ammerman Drive, known as Graveyard Hill. After early pioneers Sam and Huldah Colver sold 2 acres of their Donation Land Claim to establish a cemetery between North Church and North Rose streets, five pioneers were appointed as trustees. The group drew up plans for the plots and orchestrated relocating graves from Graveyard Hill to the new cemetery location.

While the cemetery was established in 1874 and minutes of the first meeting were recorded, it wasn't until May 30, 1892, that the cemetery gained its first sexton--railroad depot station master Dietrich Lehners. He tended the cemetery until 1906.

Otis Blankenship Jr--who has helped tend to the 5-acre cemetery in an official capacity since 1998--said the cemetery serves as a history book for the town and a tribute to "a community taking care of its own."

Blankenship's wife, Georgia Blankenship, has tended to the cemetery for most of her lifetime, with a more concerted effort--logging over 10,000 hours alongside her sister Myrna Bradley--over the past 26 years.

"They started working on their own plots, and pretty soon it just became the whole cemetery," Otis Blankenship said.

By all accounts, caretaking of the more than 1,700 interred has ultimately rested for much of the town's history in the hands of those whose loved ones are buried there and who eventually were--or will be--laid to rest in those same plots.

"I married into it, so I've just been along for the ride," Blankenship quipped. "But honestly, everyone starts out taking care of their own and then end up helping where they can. There's no one person or group that gets all the glory," he said. "There's always been people who kept it going since the beginning."

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Stagecoaches in the Rogue Valley

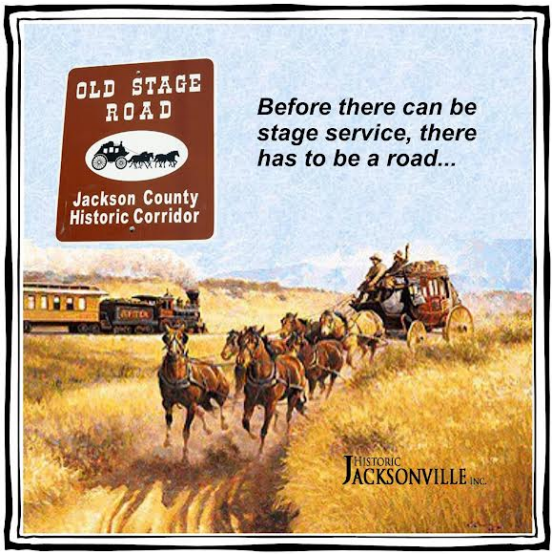
Have you ever wondered about the names "Old Stage Road" or "South Stage Road" for the streets leading north and south from Jacksonville? Well, you can't have stage service without roads. Regular stage service for the area did not begin until the mid-1850s and the stops were Ashland, Jacksonville, and Rock Point (near Gold Hill).

The route to Yreka was not a road; it was a rough and difficult passage best made on foot or horseback. The Siskiyou Mountain Wagon Road, a toll road and the first "engineered" road over the mountain crest that separates California and Oregon, did not open until August 1859. Stages could now run from Sacramento, California, to Portland, Oregon.

The stage and freight companies carried passengers at a charge of 12 1/2 cents per mile. Freight was hauled for 4 cents per pound, in large, heavily built wagons. What made the service profitable was a lucrative contract to carry the U.S. Mail. This 710-mile route was the second longest stage run in the U.S.

So why the strange 90 degree turns in the road? If a land claim holder refused permission to pass through his property, the road had to go around it.

Although pack trains occasionally carried passengers, the stage and freight wagons were the principal


OLD STAGE ROAD
Jackson County Historic Corridor
Before there can be stage service, there has to be a road...
HISTORIC JACKSONVILLE INC.

methods of transportation and passenger travel until 1884, when the railroad entered the Rogue River Valley. With completion of the railroad over the Siskiyous, the last stagecoach traversed the pass on December 18, 1887, the day following the official Golden Spike ceremony in Ashland.

By Carolyn Kingsnorth
Photo and Info: HJI

Barron Stage Station--1st Stagecoach Stop This Side of the Siskiyous

Mountain House, which is the oldest building in southern Oregon, was built in 1852 as an inn to serve gold miners. Over the years, it provided hospitality to adventurous souls traveling first by wagon train, then by horse-drawn stage coach, then by steam locomotive.

Situated at the base of the Siskiyou Mountains south of Ashland, Oregon, the Mountain House was built during the initial settlement period of the Rogue River Valley and long served as an important point in the region's transportation system. Constructed by settlers Hugh F. Barron, James H. Russell and John Gibbs in 1852, the builder first served overland travelers arriving in the valley on the South Emigrant or Applegate trail and the California Oregon Road. Later, designated as a stage station for the California-Oregon Stage Company, the Mountain House (known also as the Barron Stage Station) served without interruption between from 1860 and 1884 when the Oregon and California Railroad's progress forced the company to terminate their use of the station. Upon the joining of the railroad tracks at Ashland in 1887, stage travel over the Siskiyous came to an end.

The 1852 Mountain House was built and used for nearly three decades as an early emigrant's wayside and then as a stage station upon the major wagon route into Oregon prior to the completion of the railroad line. As enlarged with an architecturally significant addition in 1887, the Mountain House remains an important local landmark in this portion of Southern Oregon.

By Gwen Pettey
Source: *Heritage Magazine*

Phoenix Historical Society Board Members

Dick Croly: President

Dave Hodson: Vice President

Dorothy Cotton: Secretary

Dorothy Cotton: Treasurer

Lorraine Sexton

Margaret Croly

Gathering at Annual Fall Potluck

Phoenix Historical Society/ Museum members and friends gathered on September 10th for the Annual Fall Potluck held at the museum with about 30 in attendance.

A good variety of main dishes, sides and desserts were enjoyed by all. Lots of visiting and camaraderie were observed.

Dorothy Cotton welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance and support.

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Mayor Terry Baker, on hand to inspect the new archway said the sign was a nice upgrade from the wooden sign that long hung on the cyclone fence enclosure. "It looks great. It really adds validity to the landmark of it all," Baker said.

Cemetery board member Stan Bartell applauded Otis Blankenship's effort to coordinate the archway as a new entry sign. Bartell has helped with cemetery maintenance and repairs since the 1970s, including "mowing duty" with his late wife, Caroline, for decades. He said the cemetery's upkeep has been a labor of love for generations of community members. "Looking from where we've been and what we've got now, it all looks really, really nice," Bartell said. Bartell said he has no family buried in the cemetery but has committed to its maintenance over the years "to take care of the community."

Georgia Blankenship said despite stories of loss and heartache for families of those gone too soon, she focuses on the countless names of family and friends with which she holds "wonderful memories" and of a history preserved by generations of community members tending the site. Otis Blankenship said he couldn't agree more. "There's a rich history here...and a lot of community members making sure it's not forgotten."

A celebration, set for 1 p.m. Saturday, November 16, will include cake and refreshments.

By Buffy Pollock, *RV Times*, November 13, 2024

Otis Blankenship talks about how a family of children dies months apart and were buried in the cemetery.

Phoenix Historical Society & Museum
607 N. Church Street
P. O. Box 1466
Phoenix, Oregon 97535

Telephone (541) 512-0614

Open Thursday thru Saturday
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Any historical information regarding Phoenix would be much appreciated by anyone receiving this newsletter. Please send to above address or editor.

Become a member of Phoenix Historical Society for just $10.00 a year per person. Join now and help preserve the history of Phoenix and the surrounding area.
Regular PHS meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at **7:00 p.m. at the Phoenix Museum.**

This 'n That

We're going to miss long-time member and board member, Dave Hodson, who is moving on to Roseburg to be closer to family. We appreciate all the contributions he has made and his valued friend-ship. Our best to you, Dave!

Annual Christmas Potluck

December 10th; 6:00 pm; Phoenix Historical Society/Museum

Bring a dish to share and your own table service

Drinks provided